Hello and welcome to SerpentSong! Come explore my library with me with today's story, *How the Raven Helped Man*, taken from the 1971 edition of *Young Years: Best Loved Stories and Poems for Little Children*. Of course, this is not an original tale. This is actually a story adapted from the Haida of the Pacific Northwest.

The Haida are traditionally a fishing community in western British Columbia, living on the Haida Gwaii, or the "Islands of the People" (Encyclopædia Britannica). Because of the yearly salmon run, the Haida often had an easy, reliable source of food, allowing for more artistic pursuits. This includes mythology, including today's tale. The white Raven, a trickster god, steals the sun from a greedy miser in exchange for fish. In doing so, his wings become as dark as soot as he escapes through the roof.

The following is a quote from Haida elder, Henry Geddes.

> It was always dark. There was no daylight. Raven could see some boys getting lots of eulachons, and he wanted some.
>
> "Hey," he said, "how about some eulachons?" (Eulachons, being a type of fish)
>
> "Go on, go away! You're always telling lies. You better go away."

So then Raven found out where they kept the light—big and round. The wealthy ones had it. They had a big huge house, and they had a daughter. So Raven figured the only way he could get in there was to be born. So that's how he did it, the young girl had a baby, and it was Raven. And he grew rapidly. And as he got a little bigger he used to roll the light around. He used to play with it.

Then he would sit and cry, yell and cry, "Ginaa. Ginaa Ginaa." Ginaa means—you know those big Indian houses built long and in the middle they had something come up? That's where the smoke came out—they call that Ginaa. So Raven, it was all closed in, and he cried all the time and he'd say "Ginaa" all the time. So his mother said, "He wants that hole a little wider."

He kept on crying and crying. One day he started practicing flying with the light under his wing. He kept on practicing until finally he knew he could get out. So he flew out. So he went back up the river and he tell them people, he hollered at them, he said "Now if you people give me eulachons, I'll give you day light."

> "Go on, go away! You're always lying!"

"No," he says," it's true. No." So he says, "I'm going to show you—I'm going to give you just a little bit of daylight." And he showed a little bit, and the whole place was light. And he put it away, and it was dark again.

So everybody brought in—oh—loads after loads of eulachons. He couldn't ever eat all that up. So he flew down to where there were some rocks, sharp ones. So he gets this big disk, and he starts hammering away at it. And he broke it in half. And he breaks it in half, and he said, "Well,"—he throws it, and he said,

"This will be the sun. And this one," when he threw it, he said, "this one will be the moon."

So after he gathered up all the crumbs, he threw that up there, and he said, "[These] will be the stars."

This is the beginning of light in Haida mythology, and characterizes the Raven as someone who is happy to bless humanity with gifts, provided that he receives something in return. Geddes continues to state that this story is merely a part of the Raven cycle, as the Haida believe in reincarnation. This is emphasized in Raven's plan to obtain access to the light by being reborn into the family itself.

Of course, as with all myths, they can evolve and maintain variations between members of their communities, as well as being changed and appropriated significantly by those outside of their original communities. This is shown to be particularly prevalent in the book *Young Years*.

In this story, Raven finds himself arguing with Eagle about the work ethics of man. Eagle is the stand in for the greedy miser, keeping the sun, moon, stars, rivers, and other natural phenomena locked away from humanity, stating that they are not worthy of such gifts. He still has a daughter, but rather than emphasizing the theme of reincarnation by giving birth to Raven, she is simply tricked into allowing Raven to leave with the treasures.

Read from the book.

I particularly read this version of the tale as similar to the stories of Prometheus or Adam and Eve. Seeing as this is a Western publication, that's not a surprise. What I find interesting is the suggestion that the bird seen as a Western signifier of authority is the one withholding blessings from the common folk. It takes another, one that

Westerners often see as common harbingers of death and evil, to bless humanity through his sense of empathy. Satan, is that you?

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